The Truant

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THE TRUANT.

The Truant

By D. O. Teasley

Gospel Trumpet Company
Anderson, Indiana

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PREFACE.

This story is true to life. The Truant was a real man, who lived during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel. Some of the details of his life I have gathered from history, but most of them from his own writings. A few details of the setting, however, are supplied; but these are all in strict keeping, so far as I am able to judge, with the history of the times in which the Truant lived.

My object in writing this story is to emphasize the importance of obeying the voice of God, and to decry selfishness and pride, propensities that have made more than one man a truant.

Should this story prevent one

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man from playing the truant or incline one soul to obey the voice of the Lord, I shall consider myself abundantly repaid.

Yours to obey,

D. O. Teasley.

Anderson, Ind.,
Nov. 29, 1911.

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THE COMMISSION.

CHAPTER I.

In an obscure village among the sacred hills of central Galilee lived a most interesting man. In his character there was a subtile mingling of his own uncommon personality with the peculiarities of his people—the Hebrews. His features, his long-flowing beard, and his jet-black hair marked him as an Israelite indeed, while his coat of skin and his serious mein were suggestive of the prophetic order. His erect carriage, firm step, and piercing black eyes indicated a man of strong passion and deep feeling. In viewing him, however, a close observer might have instinctively felt that the prophetic garb covered a bosom in

which there glowed an unquenchable spark of national and religious pride.

He lived in those troublous times in the history of his people when the Israelitish kingdom was divided against itself and idolatry was making inroads into the religion of his fathers. The Assyrians, whose haughty capital was situated on one of the great rivers far across the Arabian desert, had already begun to oppress the kingdom of Israel. Jeroboam II, then king of Israel, though an admirable prince in some respects, was an idolater at heart. Though repeated warnings from the wise men and the prophets had failed to check him in his moral and religious degen-

eracy, yet the prophets, zealous for their national religion, proud of their ancestry, and, many of them, true to their God, continued to make frequent appeals to their recreant ruler for loyalty to the ancient covenant of Jehovah.

The man of our story, whom we shall call the Truant, was among the prophets of the northern kingdom. It was he who had foretold a notable victory of the Israelites over the Assyrians. Despite an occasional victory of the small western kingdoms, however, the proud empire of the east still continued to extend its power westward, and it seemed that unless He who rules in all the kingdoms of men should intervene, Israel would be swallowed up by

the wicked kingdom of the east.

A little Galilean village, the home of our prophet, lay quietly wrapped in the stillness of an autumn night. The sun had suddenly dropped behind Mt. Carmel, as if to bathe itself in the Mediterranean. The stars shone brightly out of a clear blue sky, and the rising east wind sighed about the corners of the housetop where the Truant reclined and mused in the dim light of the rising moon. His meditations were of Israel and of the promises made to his fathers that their seed should possess the gates of their enemies. Gradually he became more absorbed in his patriotic reverie. Bright visions appeared to him of the time when the despised

heathens should be vanquished from the Holy Land and Israel should reign supremely in the land of promise.

While these thoughts lingered and played upon his mind like dying flames upon the charring fagots, the stars in the cloudless sky above him faded from his view, and the full moon, now risen above the eastern plateau, was soon no longer visible to the eyes of the prophet. One would have thought him asleep, but in reality he was under the divine influence of a prophetic vision. All about him were clouds and mist, but through the haze a shaft of light shone as if from the throne of Jehovah, and a voice spoke, saying, "Arise, go to the capital

of the Assyrians, that great city, and preach in it, for the cry of its wickedness is come up to me. Say unto them, 'Yet forty days and this city shall be destroyed.' "

The voice ceased speaking, the clouds disappeared, and the sight of the brilliant moon made the prophet again conscious of his surroundings. But a stillness broken only by the distant yelling of a jackal or the barking of a village dog pervaded the evening air.

The prophet lay for a while in solemn meditation. Presently he rose and walked slowly to the east side of the housetop, where he stood gazing out at the eastern hilltops, outlined in the clear moonlight against the deep blue sky. On his countenance alter-

nated two expressions, unmistakably indicating that two conflicting emotions were at war in his mind.

One knowing the Hebrew character, the national relations of the Israelites and the Assyrians at the time, and the nature of the vision that the prophet had just received, could not have failed to conjecture that the prophet's national pride, religious bigotry, and life-long antipathy for heathen people were warring against the message of Jehovah to go and preach to a heathen city.

The prophet well knew that Jehovah was full of mercy and loving-kindness; for could he not remember the compassion that God had repeatedly shown to erring Is-

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rael and not infrequently to heathen nations? He naturally reasoned with himself, therefore, that two things, neither of which would be desirable to him, might result from his obeying the command of Jehovah to preach to the Assyrian city. First, if the Assyrians should repent, which was most probable, Jehovah might turn from his purpose to destroy them, and he might then be looked upon and persecuted as a false prophet; and secondly, his own people might reproach him for endeavoring to save from destruction the wicked Assyrian capital, which was already oppressing the kingdom of Israel. Would it not be far better to remain at home, prophesying to the erring of Israel,

and allow divine justice to destroy the Assyrian capital, than to go far across the Arabian desert, endure hardships, and risk even life itself to save the heathen city of the east? Yet Jehovah had said Go, and he had always been true to the divine voice.

He turned and paced back and forth across the housetop, and, speaking in audible tones, as if to strengthen his reasoning, he said: "Jehovah is full of loving-kindness. If I go and preach to the Assyrians, they may repent; then he will turn from his purpose, and the city will not be destroyed. It is better that I should stay at home and warn Israel that they turn from the idols which are already set up in the land." But, oh!—

an indescribable look of agony spread over his face, denoting a fierce battle within. He continued, "Oh, how shall I forget the voice of Jehovah saying, 'Arise, go to that great city and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee'!"

He paced back and forth across the housetop a few more times, and then, turning suddenly, he grasped his staff that leaned against the wall, and descended the rude stairway with an air that spoke decision; but what his decision was only he himself could have told.

A STORM AT SEA.

CHAPTER II.

The brave crew tugged hard at the oars, trying to bring the little ship to land; but all their efforts were in vain. So furious was the gale that the sails had already been struck to prevent the ship's capsizing. The men had now almost exhausted their strength, and the storm was growing worse. The only thing left within human power to save them was the sailor's last resort — to lighten the ship of her load by casting the wares into the sea. Tons of precious cargo were thrown overboard, until the ship ran like a feather before the increasing storm.

Each man was calling upon his

god. Jupiter, Baal, Apollo—each god had in turn been besought to calm the gale, but still the mad sea beat against them. The creaking and the moaning of the vessel, the growing fury of the storm, and the thoughts of being lost at sea brought human terror to its height. No mortal hand could help them, for all were convinced that the storm was the visitation of some angry and offended sea-god.

As human strength began to fail, the first excitement of mind caused by the sudden rising of the storm began to give way to more calm and serious consideration, and though some were still calling frantically upon their gods, a few pale and serious men were

eagerly considering what to do. They were reasoning, as even wicked men can reason when in the face of death and on the brink of eternity, that something must be done, now that their own strength was exhausted, to obtain the help of the gods. "For whose sin has this judgment been sent upon us?" was the serious question that concerned all.

Finally all gathered on the foredeck, some calling upon the gods, some discussing what could be done, and some dumb from the awfulness of the hour. Then the master of the ship remembered a strange-looking passenger, who had come aboard the vessel at Joppa and who was now nowhere to be seen. Leaving the sailors on

deck, the captain went below in search of the stranger.

Down in the lowest part of the ship lay the mysterious passenger, his head pillowed on a bundle of old ropes, where he had thrown himself in an angry pout. Despite the creaking, groaning, and lurching of the ship, he was sleeping.

The shipmaster, giving him a vigorous shake, said: "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise and call upon thy god, that he may save us and we perish not."

Without waiting for an answer, the shipmaster half dragged the stranger from his rough bed and led him toward the storm-beaten deck, where an earnest council was still being held by the

drenched and frightened crew.

"Let us cast lots," said the sailors, "that we may know for whose cause this evil hath befallen us." (Such was the custom of the ancients.) At this suggestion the storm seemed slightly to abate, but this only confirmed the sailors in the belief that the storm was a divine visitation. Hastily bringing the lot-stones, the lots were cast. The stranger, on whom all eyes were now turned, was marked as the guilty man.

"Tell us, we pray thee," said the seamen, "why this evil is upon us? What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? What is thy country? and of what people art thou?"

"Sirs, I am an Hebrew; and I

fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who hath made the sea and the dry land," answered the strange man. "My country is the land of Israel, where I have lived since my birth. I am a prophet of Jehovah, the most high and living God, the creator of heaven and earth. While in my own country the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, 'Arise, go to the capital of the Assyrians, that great city, and preach in it, for the cry of its wickedness is come up to me. Say unto them, "Yet forty days and this city shall be destroyed."' Sirs, I have served Jehovah all my life until he called me to go and preach to men of another nation, which same nation are now oppressing my people.

But now I have sinned by fleeing from the presence of the Lord. Jehovah is full of loving-kindness to them that fear him, but not slow to visit his wrath on those who disobey him."

On hearing this the men were exceedingly afraid, and they said unto him:

"What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?" for the sea wrought and was tempestuous.

"Sirs, my punishment is just, and this storm is verily sent by Jehovah," he answered. "Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you."

Unwilling to take life, lest they

should further offend the stranger's mighty God, the sailors resolved to try their oars again, and, if possible, to bring the ship to land, so that they could put their troublesome passenger ashore. But they could not bring her to land, for the sea was becoming rougher and rougher. Having showed every kindness to the man who, running from his duty and from his God, had brought them so near to death, and having exerted all their strength to save his life, even at the peril of their own, they had nothing left to do but to cast him into the sea.

That idolatrous men should show him such kindness when he had refused to preach to the heathen went home like a dagger to

the Truant's heart and filled him with feelings of guilt more painful than the thought of death at sea.

Prostrating themselves in a small circle on the forward deck of the tossing ship, the sailors prayed: "We beseech thee, O Lord God of this Hebrew, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood; for thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee." So saying, they took up the stranger, now pale-faced and dumb with remorse, and cast him into the sea.

No sooner had the great waves enveloped him than the storm began to abate. Soon the sea was calm, and the calmness filled the hearts of these Phœnician seamen

with a deeper awe than had the terrors of the storm.

Before setting sail for their port, the sailors, unlike most men when their dangers are past, sought to express their gratitude to the God whose vengeance and mercy had been manifested in the storm. In the hold they found one lamb which, when lightening the ship of her load, they had reserved. Slaying it, they sprinkled the deck with the blood, and, roasting the flesh, they ate it in worship to the God of the Hebrews and made vows to Jehovah,

THE DELIVERANCE.

CHAPTER III.

The sun, just rising above the Caucasus Mountains, was dipping its first rays in the waters of the Euxine Sea. The little fishing village of Askol on the southern shore was just beginning to show signs of life. A few women and children strolled about on the beach and, with now and then an inquiring look out over the sea, waited for the incoming of the fishermen.

"O Mama, look! look!" suddenly cried a little girl pointing out to sea.

Looking in the direction indicated by the child, the women who had assembled on the beach for the usual morning chat saw

some great object far out at sea. At first it appeared like a capsized vessel, but it was moving with unusual speed toward shore. On it came, faster and faster. A great black monster was headed with furious speed directly for the ship-landing. The whole village was soon in wild excitement. Some said it was a demon; others said it was a leviathan; while still others shrieked, "It is one of the gods."

As the monster drew near, it turned slightly to the west, and, approaching the shore at a place where the water was deepest, threw out of its mouth what looked like a mass of sea-weeds, and then disappeared as mysteriously as it had come.

The village women and a few men who had not gone to sea gathered in small groups here and there or ran frantically about and talked excitedly; but fear prevented any one from approaching the spot where the mysterious bundle lay on the shore.

The ships were now coming in. The fishermen listened with astonishment to the strange story told them by their agitated kinsmen and neighbors. Children clung to their excited mothers; men hurried to tie their boats; everything else was entirely forgotten in the excitement of the hour.

The seamen, more brave than the women, though not less superstitious, made their way cautiously toward the mysterious bundle on

the shore. Upon nearing the spot, they saw, to their surprise and wonder, a man disentangling himself from the mass of seaweeds. Soon all the villagers had gathered to the spot, and stood gazing with mingled fear and wonder on the mysterious stranger.

"Who art thou?" asked one of the fishermen with a perceptible quiver in his voice.

"I am an Hebrew," answered the stranger, as he gazed about in bewilderment and pulled his coat of skin more closely about him.

"But why hast thou come to us so strangely?" inquired a woman who had now ventured close enough to speak to the strange man. "Have the gods sent thee?"

"Perchance the Lord hath brought me," said the man as he gazed inquiringly around, as if he had been suddenly awakened in a new world. "But, pray tell me, where am I? and how came I here?"

"This, sir, is the village of Askol," some one answered.

The fear and excitement of the hour having now given place to wonder, the villagers came nearer the stranger, who now began to appear to them as a real man. The women began to explain with no little emotion the sudden appearance and immediate disappearance of the sea-monster.

The mention of the sea-monster seemed to awaken the benumbed memory of the heretofore bewil-

dered stranger, and he said to the intensely interested crowd of men and women: "I am an Hebrew of the land of Israel. While I was in my own country, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 'Go to the great and wicked city of the Assyrians and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.' From my youth I have served Jehovah, the God of Israel and the God of all flesh; but when this message came to me ————." Bending forward, he buried his face in his hands and began to weep. The wondering people looked first at the pitiable stranger bowed before them and then at one another. The sun, now risen far above the mountain-tops, poured a flood of light around

him, as if by its glory to cheer the penitent mourner as he sobbed in his own tongue, "O Eloi, Eloi!"

Suppressing his emotion, he continued: "I fled from the face of the Lord, and, going to Joppa, I took a ship for Tarsus. But when we were well on our journey, the Lord sent a great and terrible storm upon the ship, and we should all have been destroyed if I had not been cast overboard. When I was thrown into the sea, a great fish swallowed me, and from the fish's belly I cried unto the Lord and made my vows unto him. It must be that Jehovah hath been gracious unto me and hath caused the fish to vomit me out upon the dry land."

The sea-monster, having swallowed the truant prophet, had evidently made its way with the ocean-current and the storm, up through the Aegean Sea, and thence out into the Euxine or Black Sea. Then, as the Truant explained, the Lord spoke to the fish, and it threw its indigestible passenger out upon the dry land.

The prophet's mysterious and miraculous deliverance from the sea and his flood of pathetic thanksgiving to Jehovah melted the hearts of the rough fishermen and turned the superficial wonder and excitement of the hour into awe and devotion.

After the villagers had ministered to the prophet's needs, they listened with fear and wonder to

his teachings, and the whole village offered sacrifices and made vows unto Jehovah. Thus, even though he had attempted to run away from God and from preaching to the heathen, the Truant had been saved by the mercy of God and brought to dependence upon the heathen for whom he had held a life-long hatred. Finding the heathen more benevolent toward him than he had been toward them, he was glad to tell them of Jehovah and to warn them of sin.

The news of the prophet's unfortunate fate at sea and of his most fortunate deliverance spread rapidly from village to village, and hundreds of heathen gathered to hear of Jehovah, the

mighty God of the land and the sea.

He was now, moreover, by a succession of providential circumstances, nearer to the Assyrian capital than when he had determined to flee in the opposite direction from that city. Thus, his disobedience had resulted in his own punishment and sorrow, and at the same time in bringing him, not farther from the place of duty, but well on the way to his designated field of labor. By this time the Truant had come keenly to realize that when the Lord says to go east he does not mean to go west.

A HEATHEN CITY.

CHAPTER IV.

It was a wicked city, the haughty capital of the great Assyrian empire. Shut in by the mountains on the north and east and by the vast desert on the west, it was strongly protected from both mauraders and armies. From this spacious den, open to the southward, the Assyrians went out to plunder and came in with the spoil of nations. Its mighty walls, one hundred feet high and eighty feet thick, enclosed a part of the city, which was in all sixty miles, or a three days' journey, in circumference. Lasciviousness and crime held sway in almost every house, from the humblest cot to the palace of the king. Vile and vicious

gods were the objects of worship; the priests were adulterers; and the king's palace was filled with intrigue and murder. Hence the people, looking to the wicked priests and rulers as examples and having vile gods as objects of devotion, could not but grow more sinful every day; for a man's heart assimilates and conforms to the image of that which he adores. The rulers, the priests, and the gods of any nation are an index to that nation's moral condition.

The monarch of Assyria, though now spoiled and degraded by the pomp and glory of his kingdom and the growing pride and vanity of his own heart, had been a man of nobler mind than is usually found in an eastern prince of

those days. His love for justice had succumbed, however, to destructive lust, love of pleasure, and greed for gold. He had put the finishing touch to the magnificent city founded by Ninus and beautified by Semiramis. Within its gigantic walls, studded with hundreds of watch-towers, were gilded palaces, great lakes, hanging gardens, magnificent temples, and colossal monuments. Miles of broad streets were lined with the palaces of the rich and the temples of the gods, and adorned with sculptured lions, winged bulls, pleasure-grounds, and the statues of warriors and heroes.

In the midst of this labyrinth of palaces, monuments, and temples, was the "House of Nimrod," the

hereditary palace of the Assyrian kings. In the magnificent square in front of the royal palace stood a colossal statue of Nimrod, the "mighty hunter" and "king of men," towering above the palace itself and holding aloft above its head a mighty spear, whose golden point glittered like a flame of light in the dazzling sun.

The imposing palace all but defied description. Its walls, adorned externally with a thousand sculptured images, were beautified within by cedar panels, on which were carved and painted, in the artist's most brilliant colors, flaming serpents, bloody dragons, winged bulls, hideous gods, and fiery demons. Here, amidst voluptuousness, debauchery, drunkenness,

and bloodshed, lived the once virtuous and noble but now wicked and haughty monarch, the king of Assyria.

The city was on the great Indo-Mediterranean caravan route. This made it a commercial center. Here in the market-place merchants from the east and from the west met, exchanged their wares, talked of the happenings of the day and of their gods and religion. Upon the arrival of a caravan, the dwellers in the city assembled in immense crowds to hear the news and to gossip.

The sun was just sinking below the western horizon and the welcomed shadows of evening invited those who had a story to tell or those who were anxious for news,

to gather in the streets and in the market-place. A caravan had just arrived from Joppa, and had brought some extraordinary news. The men told of a strange story that certain sailors had brought from Tarsus. All over the open square dull torches battled with the fast-thickening darkness, and by the dim light one might have seen circles of brown faces eagerly looking toward certain central figures who were each in his own way telling the strange story they had heard at Joppa.

It was in one of these circles that Asdrubal, a swarthy Phœnician merchant, seated himself on a bale of cloth that had just been taken from a kneeling camel's back, and prepared to tell the

story in his own words as it had been related to him by the chief pilot of the ship that had brought the news to Joppa. He was no ordinary story-teller, and the weird light of the torch shining on his broad brow, from which his jet-black locks were carelessly thrown back, gave him a magic appearance. His clear ringing voice soon drew about him a large audience. Close around him, some seated on bales of merchandise and some seated cross-legged on the ground, three score or more brown-faced Assyrians sat eager to hear.

"It was a Phœnician ship," he began, "that had left Joppa for Tarsus. When they had sailed well out to sea, there suddenly

came upon them a furious storm. After they had vainly tried many times to bring the ship to land, and after they had lightened the ship of her load to no avail, all despaired of life; but, believing that the storm, which had come so suddenly and had waxed so tempestuous, was a divine visitation because some one of their number had offended the gods, they determined to cast lots to ascertain, if possible, on whose account it was. The lot fell upon a certain man who had come aboard the ship at Joppa as a passenger.

"When the shipmaster asked him who he was, whence he came, and what he had done, he answered that he was a Hebrew, a prophet of Jehovah, the God that

made the sea and the land. He said, also, that while he was in his own land the Lord had called him to go and preach to a certain city, but that he had refused to obey and had fled from the presence of the Lord. The storm, he further told them, was on his account.

" 'What shall we do unto thee,' inquired the frightened and anxious sailors, 'that the sea may be calm unto us?'

" 'Throw me into the sea,' said the prophet, 'so shall it be calm, for it is for my sake that this storm is upon you.'

"Unwilling to take life, and having compassion on the unfortunate Hebrew, the oarsmen tried once

more to bring the ship to land, but to no avail.

"Finally, fearing that the ship would be broken by the fierceness of the increasing gale, they bound his coat of skin about him and, after supplicating the prophet's God not to hold them guilty of innocent blood, threw him into the sea. No sooner had they thrown him overboard than the sea became mysteriously calm."

A few evenings after that on which the caravan had brought the news of the strange incident on the Mediterranean, a band of mountaineers came in from the north and brought the wonderful news of a man who, at a little village on the southern shore of the Euxine Sea, had been thrown out

on dry land by a large sea-monster. This man had told the villagers that he was a Hebrew and a prophet of Jehovah, that he had fled by water from the presence of the Lord, and that he had been thrown into the sea because God had sent a storm upon the ship.

These two strange stories were discussed in the market-place and in every public hall; for the Assyrians, though wicked, were extremely superstitious, and they feared anything that had the appearance of the supernatural. From the market-place and the public halls the story spread to every dwelling in the city, and reached even the king's chamber. It was talked of and repeated on the housetops and in the streets,

among the rich and the poor; it was wondered at by all, from the slaves to the royal family.

Having thus heard of the vengeance of the God of the Hebrews upon the disobedient prophet, and also of the prophet's miraculous deliverance from the fury of the sea, all in the great metropolis were filled with wonder and awe. In every house and family there was a fear of the great and mighty God of the Hebrews, who, it was believed, would punish severely the disobedient and be merciful unto those who loved and obeyed him.

THE REPENTANCE.

CHAPTER V.

The long shadows slowly crept toward the base of the massive east wall, as if to hide from the glorious morning sun, which was pouring a flood of light into the city. The day wore on. A thousand noises from the busy city mingled in a muffled hum. The merchantmen sold wares in the market-place, the soldiers kept their watch from the towers on the lofty walls, and chariots rumbled through the streets. In the brick-yards and other places of public works could be heard here and there the slash of the slave-drivers' whip, the groan of the slaves, the creaking of the ox-yokes, or the doleful song of the workman at his task.

Evening approached. The long shadows of the western wall, following stealthily the receding light, spread their dark mantle over the city. With the evening, as with the morning, came the ever-present and ever-increasing wickedness. Now the song of the harlot, of the dancing-girl, and of the inebriate mingled with the weird sounds of the city's hum. Hovel and palace were alike dens of vice and places of debauchery. Even the temples of the gods were little more than sanctified brothels, where licentious priests and degraded temple-girls sang the praise of unseemly gods and induced the blind worshipers to a life of shame. Witches and sorcerers abounded, and men, through su-

perstition and ignorance, worshiped bloodthirsty gods, and the vilest and lowest of passions. Great Nineveh was as wicked as she was great.

Night had passed again, and weary slaves cursed the light of another day and dragged themselves slowly forth to their toil. The noise and bustle of the city, beginning with the first streaks of gray in the east, was rapidly increasing.

But something unusual was going on at the north end of the city. Men, leaving their work, gathered in the streets and public places and eagerly discussed a topic of no common interest. The slave, the merchant, the soldier, the artisan, in fact, all

classes, men, women, and children, old and young, were concerned with the all-engaging question. Old men made their way to the temples and shrines of the gods, old women sought the witches and the soothsayers, and young and old consulted the wise men and the oracles.

The excitement traveled southward for three days and threw the whole city into a state of confusion. It was not a plague that was disturbing the peace of the city, and no besieging foe could be seen outside the city wall, nor was it the news of a defeat in the Assyrian army.

A peculiar stranger dressed in a coat of skins was going through the streets and avenues of the city

and boldly crying in a clear, unwavering voice, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." There was something in his voice that seemed to pierce the heart. The workmen forgot to work, and the merchantmen forgot to sell.

The stranger's appearance agreed with the description of the Hebrew prophet given a few days before by the caravan from Tyre and by the mountaineers from the north. The strange stories of the violent storm at sea and of the sea-monster that threw out the prophet upon the banks of the Euxine Sea were still fresh in the minds of all.

Could it be that their own great Nineveh was the city to which the great God of the Hebrews

had told the prophet to go and preach? Had this strange visitor come here to bring down upon them the wrath of the awful God who made the sea and the dry land? Would a storm or a fire from heaven soon destroy their city? Such questions were asked and reasked. News of the fearful message of the strange prophet came even to the king on his throne.

Although the chief ruler was a wicked man, yet there was something in that strange prophet's simple denunciation that sent a chill to his heart. He assembled the princes and wise men of his court, and that day the images of serpents, dragons, and winged bulls that decorated the walls of the

king's council-chamber looked down upon an august assembly of heathen nobles seriously discussing the message delivered by the prophet of the true and living God.

A great reward was offered, the second place in the kingdom, to the man who would tell the king what to do in order to avoid the overthrow of the city; for though no one could tell why, all believed the message of the prophet. A divine influence pervaded the city wherever the prophet went, and fear and trembling filled every heart.

A message was sent to the prophet commanding him to appear before the king, but his simple answer was, "I must deliver the message of Jehovah to all in

the city," and he went on crying aloud, "Yet forty days and this city shall be overthrown." Even the soldiers, remembering the story of the storm at sea and that of the great sea-monster, feared to lay hands on the defenseless prophet.

The prophet's words, "I must do the bidding of Jehovah," were repeated to the king.

"He continues to cry out," added one of the officers, " 'Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed'; and, O King, we feared to lay hands upon this man, lest the wrath of his mighty God be kindled against us, else would we have brought thee his head."

There was a prolonged silence in the council-chamber. Princes

and nobles and wise men looked at each other in silence. The king's sword had been swift to shed the blood of all who had resisted his will. Legions of soldiers were at his command. Would he allow this strange visitor to cry out unmolested against the great city of the empire?

Remembering the king's fierce anger and his unrelenting vengeance upon all who had disobeyed his command, the nobles sat in breathless and motionless silence to catch his words. But their anxiety was changed to wonder. The king, so far from speaking angrily, said gravely: "Noble sirs, there is something uncommon about this strange prophet. Who of you can tell what should be

done to avoid the curse that this prophet of the mighty God pronounces against us?"

Still no one spoke to advise the king, for how to appease the wrath of the God of the Hebrews was not well known to the heathen nobles. But while all eyes were turned upon the king, a chamberlain at one of the doors approached a nobleman and said in a hushed and trembling voice:

"Noble sir, among the captives who keep the king's chariots there is a slave that could tell the king all about the God of the Hebrews."

The nobleman, arising from his seat at the east entrance, spoke to the king in a clear and hopeful tone:

"The chamberlain informs me, most noble prince, that there is among the king's slaves a captive who can tell the king all about the God of the Hebrews and what should be done to appease his wrath."

"Send messengers," said the king, "and summon this slave to me at once."

Uria, the captive Hebrew, was light of heart that day; for though he had tried to be a faithful servant of the king, he had daily prayed with his face toward Jerusalem that Jehovah would deliver him and his exiled companions from Assyrian bondage and let them again enjoy the freedom of their own dear land of Israel, and now it seemed that

Jehovah had heard. Although Uria had not been permitted to see the prophet who was crying in the streets that Nineveh should be destroyed, he believed from the description of the man that he was the prophet of Jehovah.

Little work was going on even among the slaves, for the masters were too much concerned with the question of the hour. Now and then a taskmaster appeared and, cursing an idle slave, sent him to work with a stripe across his back, but by diligent service Uria had so won the confidence of his master that he was left most of the time to do his work unattended. He, therefore, went about his work as usual. Presently glancing up, he saw two soldiers approaching

him. What could it mean? Had the king, on account of the prophet's message, ordered all the Hebrews to be killed? and was his hope of once more seeing Israel to be extinguished by his death?

"Art thou Uria, the Hebrew?" asked one of the soldiers.

Uria, proud to be called a Hebrew even in the face of death, answered, "Yes, my lords, I am an Hebrew, and I hope in Jehovah; but be merciful unto thy servant."

"Then thou art summoned to appear before the king at once, that he may inquire somewhat of thee."

Allowing him time only to throw about him a suitable robe and to anoint his head, the sol-

diers hurried him toward the palace. When they passed the great statue of Nimrod, the soldiers, saluting the image, bowed reverently; but Uria, though humbled by servitude and full of trembling and fear, was still a true Hebrew.

"Dost thou not bow to Nimrod?" accusingly asked one of the soldiers.

After a moment's hesitation he answered the soldier:

"It is written in the law of the Lord, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.' "

The sight of the magnificent palace decorated with images and the court studded with idols brought passage after passage of the law of Moses to Uria's mind, so that, instead of increasing his

fear and trembling, it seemed to give him confidence and courage.

Soon the giant guards of the palace were passed, and the huge doors of the council-chamber swung back at the strong hand of the chamberlain, who cast a glance of recognition at the stately Hebrew.

Delivering Uria to the chamberlain, the soldiers waited in the corridor. The chamberlain delivered Uria to an usher of the court, who, at the king's command, showed him to an open space immediately in front of the king's seat. All eyes were turned upon Uria as he passed along—upon the Hebrew slave, who would have paid the penalty with his

head had he ever before been seen within the palace-grounds, but who was now to stand before the king. Remembering the glory of the kingdom of Israel, the law of Jehovah, and the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, Uria felt in his breast the burning of patriotic fire. Inspiration from above had come with the trying hour and had partly allayed the fears which, despite his outward composure, made his heart beat very rapidly.

When Uria reached the open place before the throne, he was aware that the eyes of a thousand princes and of the king of the greatest empire on earth were turned upon him, and he breathed a silent prayer to Jehovah. He

remembered, too, that as he stood he was looking toward Jerusalem; and though two great rivers and a thousand miles of desert wilds lay between him and his native home, his heart leaped at the remembrance of the text, "When thy people Israel be smitten down of the enemy . . . and make supplication unto thee . . . then hear thou in heaven . . . and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest unto their fathers."

The chief clerk arose and, addressing Uria, said:

"Servant of the king, it hath been told us that thou art a Hebrew and that thou couldst tell something of Jehovah, the god of the Hebrews. More especially,

the king wishes thy advice, if thou hast any, as to how we may appease the wrath of this god; for we have all heard of the mighty things he hath done in the land of Israel, and, as thou knowest, his prophet is crying in the streets of Nineveh, saying, 'Yet forty days and this city shall be destroyed.' If thou hast wisdom, speak on."

Eloquent in his simplicity, Uria stretched out his calloused hand toward heaven and said, "O King, Jehovah is a mighty God. It was he who made the heavens and the earth. The wickedness of Nineveh hath come up before him, and his anger is waxed hot. Now, O King, unless ye repent and turn every man from

his wickedness, Nineveh shall surely be destroyed. When Israel came out of Egypt, Moses, the servant of Jehovah, stretched out his staff over the sea, and its waters divided like a wall, and all Israel went over on dry land. Essaying to follow them, the Egyptians drove their horses and chariots on dry land into the sea; but Moses stretched out his staff again over the sea, and the waters swallowed up both man and beast of the Egyptians. But, great King, Jehovah is full of loving-kindness to them that obey him; and if thou wouldst escape his wrath, let thee and thy subjects proclaim a solemn fast, and, turning from your evil ways and the worship of these winged bulls and

the vile god Assur, call upon the name of Jehovah."

Not a voice was raised against Uria's advice; for already, through hearing of Jehovah's mighty works and the preaching of the prophet, the fear of Jehovah was upon all the assembly. The scribes were called and the following decree, sealed with the king's own signet, was sent throughout the city:

"Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: let them not feed, nor drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God. Yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God

will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"

There was mourning in every house. Every one called, not upon the gods of the Assyrians, but upon Jehovah, the great God of the Hebrews. Neither man nor beast ate food, and all were covered with sackcloth. Even the king descended from his throne, laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Wickedness and violence were discontinued, and benevolence and kindness prevailed instead. The rich sent gifts to the poor, the master was kind to the slave, and cruel officers were lenient with the people.

Thus in the short space of three

days the inhabitants of a mighty city were turned from wickedness, violence, and bloodshed to righteousness, benevolence, and devotion—the result of the obedience of one missionary to the call of God.

A WITHERED VINE.

CHAPTER VI.

The prophet was exceedingly grieved. An ugly worm had cut the roots of the beautiful *ricinus communis* that had grown up over his booth to shelter him from the blazing sun, the plant had withered, and a vehement east wind was making him faint. He had waited now forty days, for in that length of time Jehovah had said great Nineveh should be destroyed. The prophet had waited patiently to see whether his prediction would be fulfilled; but the Lord, seeing the repentance, the fasting, and the sackcloth of the Assyrians, had turned from his purpose to destroy them.

When the prophet saw that the

city was not going to be destroyed, he was angry and reproached the Lord, saying: "I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarsus, for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live."

Angry, sullen, and disappointed because his words had not been fulfilled, even at the cost of more than one hundred and twenty thousand lives, the prophet had gone out on the east side of the city and had built himself a

booth on the mountain-side to watch, half hoping that the city might yet be destroyed, for selfish desire clings desperately to the last ray of hope that promises its own gratification. There he sat, a sulky, selfish Jew, believing that only an Israelite should have a place in the mercy of God, and angry because his words had not been fulfilled in spite of the repentance of the city.

As the prophet's booth was made of thin branches, it afforded him a poor shelter from the scorching sun; so the Lord caused a luxuriant plant to grow up over the booth to shelter the angry prophet from the rays of the sun. Of this the Truant was exceeding glad.

It is strangely true that selfish men are highly pleased with some trivial thing just because it suits them and because they reap its benefits; yet, like the prophet, they would rather see a nation deprived of the favor of God than to have their own ways miscarry.

While the prophet was yet rejoicing over the plant, a worm cut its roots and it withered as quickly as it had grown. Faint from the heat of the sun and from the hot east wind, and angered by the loss of the sheltering plant, he sank into a swoon. While he thus lay, the same voice that he had heard that memorable night when, on the housetop in Galilee, he had decided to flee from the

presence of the Lord, spoke to him again.

"Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?" it said.

"I do well to be angry, even unto death," answered the Truant.

Then said the Lord: "Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night. Should not I spare Nineveh that great city wherein are more than six score thousand persons that can not discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"

At this loving rebuke, sorrow more pungent than had pierced the

Ninevites pierced the heart of the first truant, then selfish, and now discouraged prophet; and, falling on his face in the thin shades of his booth, he sobbed: "O Lord, did I not promise thee when thou didst deliver me from the sea-monster's belly and conmmand me the second time to go and preach to this wicked city, that I would obey thee? And have I not done thy bidding? Yet, O Lord, I came not with enough love, and was angry at the manifestation of thy mercy to the heathen, and preferred even mine own desires to the life of thousands. Take now, O Lord, I beseech thee, my life from me, for it is better that I should die than live."

There in the broken shadows of

his thin booth, to which feebly clung the withered *ricinus communis*, lay a despondent shattered soul—the Truant—the final result of the first wrong step—running away from God.

Many people, like the Truant, think it better to stay at home and preach to Israel than to go thousands of miles away and preach to heathen; but the heathen, like the Ninevites, will often repent at the first opportunity, while Israel must sometimes be called again and again.

Some missionaries grieve because they have failed to accomplish visible results; this man grieved and was angry enough to die because he had succeeded in

saving a nation. Selfishness and pride will make a man angry even with success, unless success comes just his way.

Love will make a man content with failure when he has done his best to succeed; selfishness will make a man angry with success when he can not have success his own way.

Love can rejoice in the humiliation of self when it means the salvation of others; selfishness would sacrifice the life of thousands rather than forfeit one selfish desire or hear one ill word spoken of self.

To hear the call of God and

flee means to pay the Truant's penalty and to face the call again some other day. When God says, "Go and preach to the heathen," it will not do "just as well" to stay at home and preach to Israel; when he says, "Go to Nineveh," he does not mean, "Flee to Tarsus."

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